United Nations A/HRC/30/NGO/55

General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 September 2015

English only

Human Rights Council
Thirtieth session
Agenda item 4
Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Global Network for Rights and Development (GNRD), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.15-15009(E)

Please recycle

Immediate Protection for Children in Yemen

Children living in the midst of armed conflict are disproportionately affected by violence, and are often the most susceptible to exploitation, sexual abuse, and other physical and mental harm. Some children are stripped of their innocence and forced to take up arms, while most others are invariably the first to succumb to malnutrition and disease. When communities are faced with food shortages and aid blockades, children inevitably suffer, and are denied the basic rights afforded them under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and international humanitarian law.

Such conditions have rapidly proliferated in Yemen, where over 400 children have been killed and over 600 others injured. Hundreds of thousands of children now live in appalling conditions that are largely caused by widespread use of child soldiers, unlawful killing, rape and other acts of sexual violence, abduction, enslavement and forced marriage, displacement and blockage of or obstruction to humanitarian aid, and indiscriminate use of heavy artillery and other deadly weapons.

Many of the Yemeni non-state armed groups are exploiting these vulnerabilities of children, including trauma suffered as they are caught in the midst of conflict. These unlawful entities recruit the children after seeing their relatives killed, schools shelled and communities destroyed, then deploy them in all sorts of activities for which the children are unsuitable. Last May, the UN secretary-general published a detailed report citing all violations against children in armed conflict, which found that many sectors of Yemen's national armed forces, such as the First Armoured Division, as well as Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) enlisted children as soldiers. There are different forms of engaging children in combat: some are used directly in fighting, others for wider distribution of weapons, or they are used as cooks, spies, messengers, or even for sexual exploitation, especially if they happen to be girls. According to UNICEF, one third of non-state armed militias in Yemen are comprised of minors under the age of 18. The United Nations has observed young boys serving in Houthi forces manning checkpoints, driving armed vehicles, and guarding buildings.

Article 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, to which Yemen is a party since 2007, clearly states that non-state armed groups *"...should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18."*

In addition to the suffering from such atrocities, the armed conflict in Yemen not only continues to cause violations of children's rights to life and physical integrity, but also deprives them of their basic economic, social and cultural rights. They are denied access to school, and have limited access to food, doctors, medical care and justice. Moreover, the violence has left countless children homeless and separated from their parents.

One of the main objectives of Global Network for Rights and Development (GNRD) is to protect the civilian population, in particular children, from the adverse effects and dangers of military action, and to enhance their right to life, human dignity, education and development, with the child's best interest always as the foremost priority. Consequently:

- GNRD is deeply concerned about the harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on the physical and mental development of children, and the long-term consequences for human security, durable peace and sustainable development, particularly in the on-going Yemeni conflict. We implore this Council to pass an urgent resolution that will address the deteriorating humanitarian situation and protect vulnerable groups including children and women.

- We believe that more targeted measures should be carried out by this Council to hold parties who commit violations against children in situations of conflict accountable for their actions and bring them to justice through existing legal mechanisms.

- GNRD condemns all practices of the recruitment, training, and use of children within and across national borders in hostilities by armed groups and all non-State actors. We strongly call on all parties to discontinue the use of child soldiers.

- We also call on all parties to this conflict to immediately cease hostilities in and around civilian areas, and restore full humanitarian aid to all affected groups.

- We urge UN Member States to increase global humanitarian funding to aid children who have been negatively affected by conflict, specifically in order to expand reintegration programmes for children who have been the victims of military recruitment. These children must not only be released, but receive continued psychological care to minimize the severe mental health impact of such traumatic experiences.

- Furthermore, GNRD strongly urge all parties to the conflict to guarantee that any further military action adheres to the provisions of international humanitarian law. The parties in conflict must respect their commitments towards civilians, medics, and aid workers caught in the conflict, and cease the targeting of civilians including refugee, child, and medical centres. Additionally, we urge all parties to the conflict to take steps to facilitate the safe transit and operation of medical staff in the area, and to allow immediate access to areas where their services are required.